

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----120594 082025Z /62

R 081906Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9242
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USNATO
USNMR SHAPE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 10595

EXDIS

MILITARY ADDRESSEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, PGOV, UR, GW
SUBJECT: BREZHNEV VISIT TO FRG: FURTHER ON HIS HEALTH

REFS: (A) BONN 08512 (B) MOSCOW 11895 (C) MOSCOW 10476

1. LIKE MOSCOW, WE REMAIN SOMEWHAT BAFFLED BY THE HOST OF CONTRADICTORY REPORTS THAT WE AND MOSCOW HAVE RECEIVED FROM VARIOUS GERMAN SOURCES REGARDING THE STATE OF BREZHNEV'S HEALTH DURING HIS VISIT TO BONN. WE ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER THE EXPLANATION FOR THESE CONTRADICTORY REPORTS MAY LIE NOT ONLY IN THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE WITNESSES HAD PREVIOUSLY KNOWN BREZHNEV BUT ALSO IN SWIFT VARIATIONS THAT MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN BREZHNEV'S CONDITION.

2. LIKE THE GERMAN MINISTER-COUNSELOR IN MOSCOW (REF B)
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WE HAVE HEARD OUR SHARE OF HORROR TALES. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE HEARD THAT BREZHNEV DID NOT RECOGNIZE MRS. BRANDT (NOT MR. BRANDT AS ARNOT HAD REPORTED); THAT BREZHNEV REFERRED TO SCHMIDT REPEATEDLY AS "HERR BRANDT" OR THE RUSSIAN EQUIVALENT; THAT BREZHNEV ALMOST HAD ONE OR TWO SERIOUS ACCIDENTS BY WANDERING FROM ESTABLISHED ROUTES AND THAT AT TIMES HE WAS TOTALLY UNCONSCIOUS OF

HIS SURROUNDINGS; AND THAT, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, RUSSIAN OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE NEAR HIM SHOWED GREAT NERVOUSNESS ABOUT WHAT HE MIGHT DO NEXT.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE HAD REPORTS FROM PERSONS WHO SPENT SOME TIME WITH BREZHNEV TO THE EFFECT THAT HE SEEMED IN COMMAND OF SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES AND THAT HE APPEARED TO EXERCISE POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND SUBSTANTIVE LEADERSHIP EVEN OVER THOSE WHO WERE OFFERING HIM COUNSEL OR, AS APPROPRIATE, PHYSICAL SUPPORT. ONE OBSERVER SUMMARIZED HIS IMPRESSION BY SAYING THAT THE SCENE REMINDED HIM OF WHAT HE HAD READ OF ANCIENT COURTS, WHERE AN AGED KING WOULD BE PROPPED UP AND WOULD REMAIN LEGITIMATE AND IN AUTHORITY EVEN AS HIS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL POWERS WANED.

4. WE NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT PEOPLE WHO SAW BREZHNEV SEVERAL TIMES HERE SAID THAT THEY HAD THE FEELING THAT THE FIRST DAY WAS HIS WORST. ON THAT DAY HE HAD THE LONG FLIGHT, THE RIGOROUS ROUTINE OF THE ARRIVAL CEREMONY, A MEETING AND A DINNER THAT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE LATE BY HIS OWN CIRCADIAN RHYTHM. WE HAVE HEARD FEWER STORIES OF HIS FAILINGS ON HIS SUBSEQUENT DAYS, AND SUCH REPORTS AS WE HAVE HAD OF HIS HAMBURG MEETING WITH SCHMIDT INDICATE THAT HE APPEARED THERE TO HAVE BEEN IN THE BEST FORM AND ALSO MOST RELAXED.
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5. OBVIOUSLY, WE CANNOT PRONOUNCE OURSELVES EXPERTS ON BREZHNEV'S HEALTH BUT SUCH EVIDENCE AS WE HAVE HEARD HERE AND AS REPORTED BY GERMAN OFFICIALS TO US AND TO EMBASSY MOSCOW APPEARS TO SUGGEST THAT HE TIRED EASILY HERE AND THAT NOBODY COULD BE SURE OF HIS CONDITION FROM ONE MINUTE TO THE NEXT, WITH THE DEGREE OF TIRING PERHAPS ALSO HAVING AN IMPACT.

6. PERHAPS RELATED TO THIS, AND RESULTING FROM HIS OWN NEED TO CONSERVE HIS ENERGY, BREZHNEV APPEARED TO DEAL CLOSELY ONLY WITH THE SUBJECTS THAT DEEPLY INTERESTED HIM. ONE GERMAN OFFICIAL WHO PARTICIPATED IN SEVERAL MEETINGS AND SAT A FEW FEET FROM BREZHNEV DURING THE DINNER HAS TOLD US THAT BREZHNEV APPEARED TO BE INTERESTED IN ONLY TWO TOPICS: FIRST, THE IMPORTANCE OF ARMS CONTROL AND ITS RELATION TO WORLD PEACE; SECOND, THE ECONOMIC PROGRESS OF THE SOVIET UNION. THIS OFFICIAL SAID THAT BREZHNEV APPEARED MOST INCLINED TO DEPART FROM ESTABLISHED POSITIONS WHEN DEALING WITH THOSE TOPICS BUT
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THAT HE ALMOST ALWAYS TOOK REFUGE IN PREPARED TEXTS OR IN THE GUIDANCE OF HIS COLLEAGUES WHENEVER OTHER SUBJECTS AROSE.
STOESSEL

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